



United States Department of Agriculture

FY15 Restoration and Resource Protection Projects on the Coconino National Forest



Forest Service

Coconino National Forest

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Introduction

This report documents restoration and resource protection projects related to motor vehicle use on the Coconino National Forest. A key element of motor vehicle management on the Coconino National Forest includes efforts to reduce unauthorized motor vehicle use in areas with sensitive forest resources. The Forest has focused on restoration and resource protection by engaging diverse publics to move toward sustainable access and recreation in a way that advances the Forest Service mission. This has included working with local stakeholders to improve common understanding of the importance of creating sustainable recreation opportunities and building relationships with a diversity of forest users who enjoy and actively care for the Coconino National Forest.

The 2014 Coconino National Forest Motor Vehicle Management Implementation Plan (http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3817495.pdf) includes specific strategies to reduce areas with ongoing unauthorized use that results in resource damage or user conflict. Specific actions identified in the plan include:

- Continue to identify problem areas and document issues in these areas
- Identify one or two problem areas to focus on each year and take steps to reduce unauthorized use and restore natural conditions by using multiple tools including education, signage, enforcement, and ‘soft’ closures (blocking route with branches, rocks, etc. without the use of heavy equipment).
- Block access to maintenance level 1 (long-term closure) roads where there is evidence of regular unauthorized motor vehicle use or potential impacts to sensitive forest resources.

These specific steps have been implemented with help from a broad diversity of publics in a number of instances during the 2015 fiscal year to reduce unauthorized motor vehicle use in areas with sensitive resources. This report is to document some of these key efforts completed in fiscal year 2015 on the Coconino National Forest.

Hart Prairie Forest Resource Protection

In September of 2015 the Flagstaff Ranger District used an employee workday to build log pole fencing along the parking area at the terminus of 9007T. Off-road motor vehicle use in this area had become an occasional, but regular occurrence. This off-road motor vehicle use affects the high elevation grassland and meadows, which are a rare vegetation type and is important wildlife habitat for elk, deer, and many other species. Within 100 yards of the parking area is a small population of sapling Bebb willows, which are a Southwestern region sensitive species. Off-road use has also led to motorized trespass on the adjacent Nature Conservancy Hart Prairie Preserve. The log pole fence and new signage is expected to eliminate this previous unauthorized motor vehicle use. Efforts in this area also included replacing worn signage, installing new signage in areas with evidence of past off-road motor vehicle use.

These resource protection efforts dovetail with similar projects completed last year in the vicinity of Forest Road 627. These efforts were specifically prioritized because of the area's ecological importance to facilitate restoration of impacted areas and reduce the potential for future resource impacts.



Figure 1. Installation of a log pole fence around the parking area at 9007T



Figure 2. Photo collage of Flagstaff workday accomplishments.

Potato Lake Restoration and Resource Protection

The area surrounding Potato Lake on the Mogollon Rim Ranger District includes dense mixed conifer forests with cienegas, meadows, and aspen and maple draws. It provides habitat for a number of species protected under the Endangered Species Act including several Mexican spotted owl Protected Activity Centers and little Colorado spinedace headwater streams. Because of the sensitive wildlife habitat in the area, many of the roads were not designated for public motor vehicle use, however, the majority of the routes have continued to receive unauthorized motor vehicle use. We have also observed other issues in this area where inappropriate motor vehicle use has resulted in impacts to vegetation, soils, and wildlife. For example, there has been several instances of car camping in meadows in Potato Lake Draw, which is adjacent to little Colorado spinedace habitat. We have also observed cutting of fences and inappropriate ATV use in Potato Lake Draw and the establishment of new two-track routes in the vicinity of Potato Lake to access existing closed roads.

To address these ongoing impacts, a multitude of efforts have been made with partners including the American Conservation Experience (ACE), Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and boy scout troops to reduce off-road motor vehicle use that damages habitat, and discourage motor vehicle use on non-designated routes. In July and August 2015, the Mogollon Rim Ranger District implemented the following measures:

- A SWECO trailer tractor was utilized to correct drainage and initiate revegetation on three sections of roads and dispersed campsites
- Personnel crews seeded and placed forest debris on approximately 12 roads beds

- Five segments of log-worm fence was constructed to prevent off-road motor vehicle use in meadows and drainages
- At the entrance to Potato Lake, a gate was installed to prevent motor vehicles from driving all the way to the Lake and two log worm fences were built to keep motor vehicles out of Potato Lake Draw

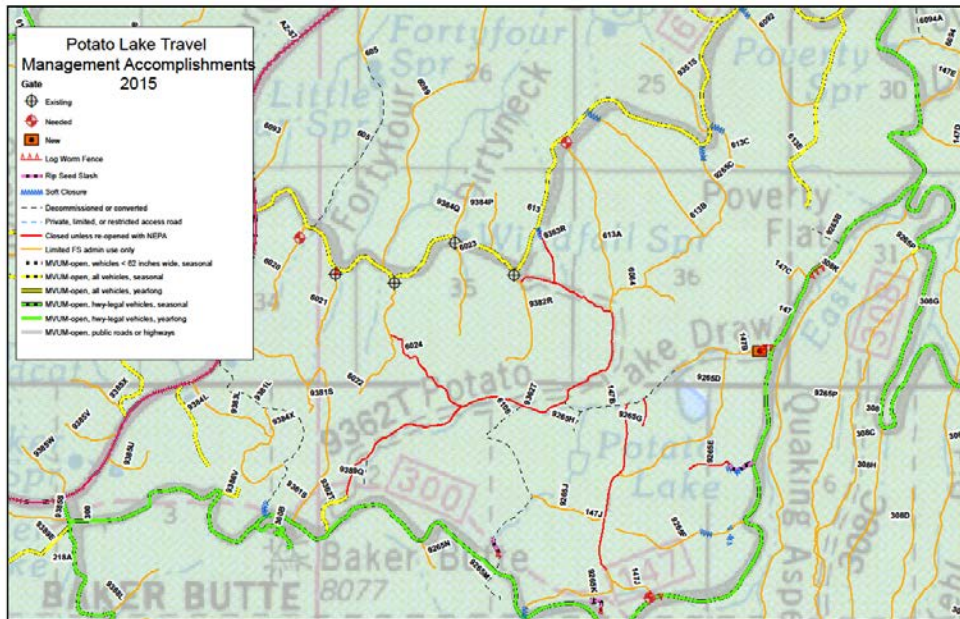


Figure 3. Motor vehicle management efforts accomplished in the Potato Lake area during 2015



Figure 4. Recontouring and re-seeding of a non-system road to restore forest vegetation by American Conservation Experience (ACE)



Figure 5. Covering a non-system road with slash reduces unauthorized motor vehicle use

These efforts in the area surrounding Potato Lake builds on previous efforts taken in 2014 to prevent the establishment of new motorized routes, additional road closure signage, and site visits to document problem areas and identify potential solutions.



Figure 6. Log worm fence built along meadow habitat along Poverty Draw

Jacks Flat Road Closures

Jack Flat represents an area along Wet Beaver Creek, which includes a loop road that follows along the river and can be used to illegally access portions of Montezuma Castle National Monument and several adjacent Camp Verde Neighborhoods. This area has been identified for non-motorized recreation. Ongoing motorized use in this area results in user conflict and ecological impacts.

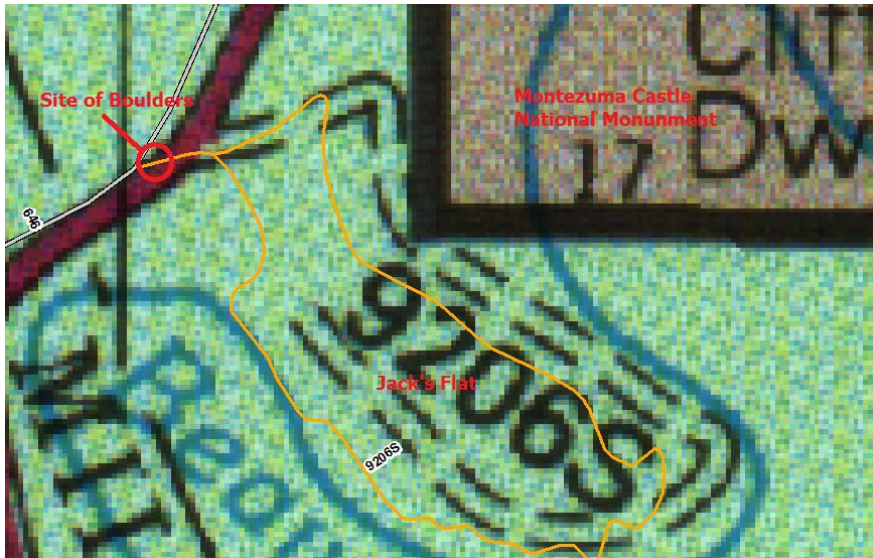


Figure 7. Map of Jacks Flat Project Area

The Red Rock Ranger District hired a contractor to place boulders along the designated route to keep motor vehicles off of the undesignated 9206S road. The forest coordinated with adjacent land owners such as the Montezuma Castle National Monument and a special use permittee.



Figure 8. A double-wall of boulders to reduce unauthorized motor vehicle use

Mountaineire and Kachina Village Resource Protection

The area south of Flagstaff includes the communities of Mountaineire, Kachina Village, and other private lands and access routes along Interstate 17. Since the national forest system lands surround each community, there has developed a network of routes surrounding the area over the past several decades. Despite lacking designation for motorized use, most of the existing routes in this area receive regular motorized use and access. Portions of these areas also get heavily used for dispersed car camping, such as the hundreds of campsites that become regularly occupied during the summer months along Forest Road 237. This use appears to continue to increase each year, resulting in ongoing and increasing conflicts and impacts.

User conflict in the area is a result of activities such as target shooting, and the regularity of unauthorized motor vehicle use and unattended campfires, which increases the risk of wildfire to the community of Kachina Village. Resource concerns come from the high density of roads in areas like pumphouse wash, a high occurrence of unsustainable non-system roads used as OHV hill-climbs, and car camping that occurs in drainages, such as along Fry Creek. There is also Mexican spotted owl habitat in areas that have experienced heavy and regular car camping and motorized use.



Figure 9. Soft closure of non-system road off of Forest Road 762 using logging slash

The Flagstaff Ranger District has addressed these multifaceted issues with a matching approach including road closures, road rehabilitation, changes to road designations, designation of designated motorized campsites, and design and designation of OHV motorized recreation opportunities. In response to the need for motorized recreation opportunities, the Flagstaff Ranger District approved the Kelly Motorized Trail System in 2013, which includes almost 100 miles of motorized trails of single track and ATV use. As part of this decision, there was clearance for decommissioning several existing roads that are no longer needed for motorized access. This

decision was meant to provide motorized recreation in a fun, safe, and ecologically sustainable way in areas with this existing tradition of use.

Other areas, with important wildlife and watershed resource value have been the focus of efforts to close, block, and rehabilitate undesignated routes. For example, in November of 2014 and September of 2015, the Flagstaff Ranger District and Forest engineering crew implemented “soft closures” on more than a dozen roads outside the community of Mountainaire and in drainages such as Pumphouse wash and Schoolhouse wash. These soft closures include the dense placement of logging debris and slash on the road surface. This technique is useful for discouraging unauthorized motor vehicle use as well as decreasing roadway erosion and runoff.



Figure 10. Soft closure of Forest Road 9420M

In the Kachina Village area, residents worked closely with the Flagstaff Ranger District to implement a decision from the 2005 Kachina Village Forest Health Project, which authorized the establishment of designated dispersed campsites and closed the surrounding area to camping. This area has seen an explosion of general weekend recreation and car camping in the past few years as it has become a go-to place to send Forest visitors who cannot find camping in the area around Sedona or Oak Creek Canyon. With more people has come substantial amounts of trash and human waste, record numbers of unattended campfires, unauthorized motor vehicle use, and user conflicts resulting from target shooting in the area (which is a legal activity in this area). So, the Flagstaff Ranger District and community of Kachina Village worked together to establish four designated dispersed camping area loops with 75 dispersed campsites. Community members volunteered to help implement the designated campsites and as “campsite hosts” by working closely with agency personnel during the summer weekends to educate and enforce the new rules.

This management change was seen as a large success by removing direct impacts to water quality along Fry Creek, removing car camping in Mexican spotted owl protected habitat, and introducing a more sustainable method for accommodating car camping and other uses in the area. Efforts in this area need to be maintained, and a long-term approach is needed to address human waste and trash associated with car camping in the area. The use of log pole fence to block

hill-climbs along the 237 road and revegetation of several of the non-system roads is expected to improve watershed conditions in the surrounding Fry Creek drainage.

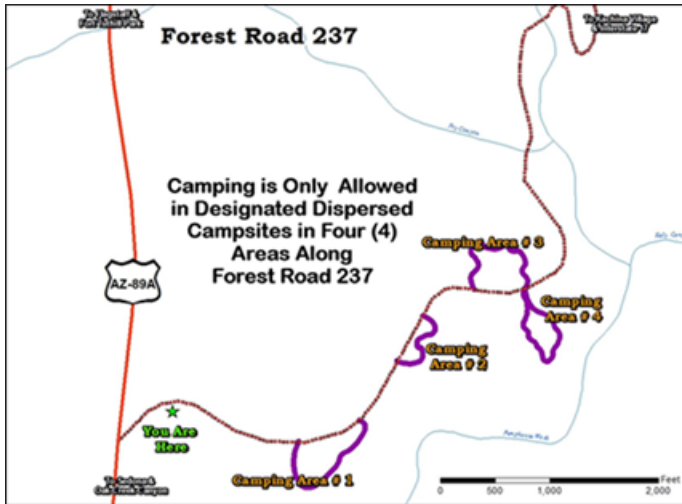


Figure 11. Sign installed at entry to FR 237 showing designated dispersed camping areas



Figure 12. Hill-climbs from FR237 down into Fry Creek are now blocked by log pole fences

Russell Wash Resource Protection Project

Russell wash is an area easily accessible from the communities of McGuireville and Rimrock, which includes a vast network of non-system roads and trails. Many of them have been here for many years whereas others are more recent. Almost all of them continue to receive regular motor

vehicle use. In addition to being in close proximity to private lands, the main access roads leading into the area appear to be open (road closed posts are quickly removed) and are regularly used.

Russell wash includes open desert scrub vegetation, which makes the ground very susceptible to the establishment of new routes. This also means that it is very susceptible to erosion, and easily accessed by motor vehicle. Russell Wash feeds into Wet Beaver Creek in an area with both yellow-billed cuckoo and loach minnow critical habitat. The unauthorized motor vehicle use in this area is contributing to downstream sediment into the creek and these sensitive habitats.



Figure 13. Gate and fencing installed on 9203C to reduce unauthorized motor vehicle use

The Red Rock Ranger District made several efforts last year to sign the area and physically block motorized use in many areas using rocks and wire mesh. Enforcement efforts were also focused in this area to address illegal trail building and resource damage. In 2015, the Red Rock Ranger District installed a gate (with equestrian pass through) and fencing to prevent unauthorized motorized use on and surrounding 9202Y, which is a main pass through road between Lake Montezuma and Forest Road 618.

The District staff took great efforts to contact locals who use the area to explain the motor vehicle rules and the reasons for restoring the area to protect its natural character. They installed signs with information about the restoration and provided contact information for those with concerns. Lastly, gap fencing and gates were installed to block off-road and unauthorized motor vehicle use ant some of the most heavily used access points.

Babbitt Spring Cultural Resource Protection

In September 2015, the Flagstaff Ranger District teamed up with Friends of Northern Arizona Forests (FONAF) to rebuild a segment of fence that leads to Babbitt Spring and the Clark Cabin archaeological site. The fence had been partially destroyed and vehicles were driving into the spring area and camping at the archaeological site. A new fence and new signs were installed to deter OHV access and car camping in these sensitive areas.



Figure 14. New Babbitt Spring information signs installed on the rebuilt log pole fence.

Forest Road 127 Noxious Weed Spread Prevention

The leafy spurge has been identified as the number one priority for noxious weed management control on the Coconino National Forest and surrounding national forest lands. The largest leafy spurge population is located near Brolliari Park along FR 127 and in the past several years it has been observed to have been spread along nearby roads and dispersed car camping sites in the area. Motor vehicle use in areas with leafy spurge have been shown to spread the population of this weed, so weed treatments and restricting motor vehicle use in areas with existing leafy spurge populations are the most effective methods to prevent spread of existing populations and establishment of new populations within and adjacent to the national forest.

In the summer of 2015 the Flagstaff Ranger District constructed a number of log-pole fences with educational signage to both prevent motor vehicle access to areas with the highest concentration of leafy spurge and also to educate forest visitors on why the areas were blocked from motor vehicle use.



Figure 15. Log pole fence and educational signage built along FR127 to prevent the spread of leafy spurge

Many of the areas blocked to motor vehicle access also included leafy spurge herbicide treatments and revegetation efforts to promote the growth of native plants that would reduce the likelihood of invasive species reestablishment.



Figure 16. Forest road 9473K, which was treated for leafy spurge, then fenced, seeded, and mulched to effectively reduce leafy spurge establishment and spread

Conclusion

The Coconino National Forest uses a focused approach to managing roads and restoration efforts to meet resource management goals for water quality, wildlife, cultural resources and other forest resources. The efforts discussed above provide examples of where steps have been taken in specific areas to protect key forest resources from impacts associated with motor vehicle use.

Efforts to rehabilitate and block non-designated roads have been a key element in managing for forest resiliency and resource protection on the Coconino National Forest. The Forest has integrated these on-the-ground efforts with education and by partnering with diverse publics to support more long-term sustainable recreation and access. The forest uses a case-by-case approach to manage access, block, or rehabilitate roads based on the situation and resource and access needs present. This report provides information on a diversity of tools being used to meet wildlife, watershed, and cultural resource management goals; while also addressing user conflict and accommodating sustainably managed recreation.